

Shortgrass Country  
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This communique comes from a transient terminal at the El Paso International Airport. The time is a few days before the last election. Through the window and toward the passenger ramp, a big league politician is being welcomed by city dignitaries and the local press.

To avoid being punched in the shortribs, I'm holding a well protected corner, using a cigarette machine to cover my right flank. At first, I tried to use the shelves at the public telephones to put my notepad on, but a press agent for the honoree ordered me to leave the space around all nine phones free for their action. I guess the telephone service is so bad here that you need nine outlets to make one call.

I don't carry a press card for fear that while the government is in a humor to stamp out the blabbermouth newspaper men, they might make a clean sweep. Also, Shortgrass reporter credentials wouldn't get you into the balcony section of a saxophone solo at the morning matinee.

I always thought that if anyone ever asked me why I packed a notebook and ball-point, I'd tell them that the utility company had me hired me to count the light bulbs in the place at hand. Surely there's nobody real mad at the light bulb counters.

They're putting on a regal drama outside. Some local big host in a soldier's hat is giving out plenty of orders. On the unloading ramp, a six-piece Mexican band is providing enough music to choke the roar of the incoming planes. One smooth mouthed lady is busy packing roses back and forth from a station wagon. The music and flowers are being used to distract from the awful truth that the atmosphere in the airport area is so polluted by noise and smog that a veteran artillery man couldn't stand the surroundings.

Unloading a politician takes more help than is required to work a trainload of cattle. He must have a dozen aides. Several of his hired hands have been airborne so long that their hair and whiskers make them look like prospectors. Actually, I can't tell how many people were working for him, because everybody except myself and the fellow cleaning the ashtrays in the lobby acts so important that they can't be sorted. I'd say, however, that unless the worthy one is figuring on rewriting the constitution before the first of the year, he sure won't be shortanded on secretaries.

An hour ago, I was at a cattle auction some 200 air miles west of El Paso in southern Arizona. The fellow who owned the outfit was having to keep his sons out of school to hold his weekly sale. His wife was running the office and he was doing four men's work in a high run

Mexican bands weren't playing, nor were there any old ladies packing bouquets of roses. The nearest piece of hatwear that resembled a soldier's hat was an old boy wearing a black brimmed truck driver's cap.

The auction house lobby didn't have nine outgoing telephones. Cow people were thick in the area, yet they weren't trying to use their elbows like they were playing defensive football for a professional team. You didn't have to make a line drive to get out the doors. You wouldn't have been treated any nicer in the parlor of Miss Amy Vanderbilt.

Life's schedule works that way. If I could have seen the politician's masquerade before I saw the auction owner's layout, I could have given the Arizona cow peddler some good ideas on how to add important flourishes to his place. Rose petals, for example, falling over the working pens would have brightened the deal. Mexican music is welcome anywhere, and I never saw a livestock operation that couldn't use a fellow wearing a soldier's hat to stand in the gates.

I'm going to have to go to the motel to get out of this politician's way. A tender bearded kid just cast a menacing glance at my direction. I'm not taking up much space, but I really haven't much enthusiasm to watch any more of the show.